



## Gen Z Leads a 66% Surge in Self-Taught Job Skills, Creating a Verification Headache

*With unconventional learning on the rise, companies face mounting pressure to separate genuine expertise from resume noise.*

**OKLAHOMA CITY, Feb. 25, 2026** — From YouTube crash courses to TikTok tutorials promising “job-ready skills in under 10 minutes,” self-taught learning is exploding, and it’s beginning to reshape resumes across the country.

A recent Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey shows 74% of job seekers and 71% of hiring managers believe skills learned through informal online platforms are credible. Yet with nearly half of job seekers (47%) now adding these self-taught skills to their resumes, employers say evaluating them is becoming more challenging than ever.

This surge is especially pronounced among younger workers, as 66% of Gen Z report teaching themselves skills online, compared to 50% of millennials, 35% of Gen X and just 20% of boomers or seniors. Men (53%) are also more likely than women (40%) to include self-taught skills on their resumes.

### A Growing Skill Set with Uneven Evaluation

Despite the rising prevalence of do-it-yourself digital learning:

- 53% of hiring managers still prefer formal education.
- 29% value formal and self-taught skills equally.
- 18% now favor self-taught learning.



Job seekers are similarly divided: 24% say self-taught skills help them stand out, while 23% believe they may hurt their chances.

### **Platforms Are Teaching Skills, but Employers Want Proof**

With candidates absorbing skills through algorithm-recommended playlists and short-form tutorials, hiring managers say resumes alone often fail to provide meaningful clarity.

A striking 92% of hiring managers say demonstrating how skills were used — or how they would be applied — is more effective than reviewing a resume.

What boosts employer confidence?

- Demonstrated industry knowledge (47%)
- Clear explanations of how skills were used (46%)
- Completion of a work sample or assessment (45%)
- References (37%), employee referrals (29%) and team impressions (22%)

In today's hiring environment, binge-learning online is welcomed, but proof still outweighs platform.

### **Updating Hiring Playbooks**

As self-taught skills become more mainstream:

- 50% of hiring managers say their company has already updated hiring processes to recognize and verify self-taught skills.
- 35% say more updates are planned.

Larger employers are leading these changes as they encounter self-taught candidates at a higher volume.

### **Self-Teaching Fueled by AI**

AI and automation are expanding the need for ongoing upskilling.

Seventy-five percent of job seekers say AI advancements make them more likely to pursue additional training.

- 76% believe it is appropriate to learn professional skills using AI, including 27% who say it is completely appropriate.
- Men are more likely than women to pursue additional training (79% vs. 71%) and to endorse AI-based learning (82% vs. 69%).

As AI reshapes work, it is also reshaping how people prepare for it.

“Self-learning is opening doors for workers everywhere, but it also raises the bar,” said Bob Funk Jr., CEO, President and Chairman of Express Employment International. “Job seekers must be ready to demonstrate their abilities right away, and employers should update their hiring practices to evaluate the skills people gain on their own. As self-taught learning becomes more common, refining how to assess these skills will help employers make better, more confident decisions about the talent they bring on board.”

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### **Survey Methodology**

The Job Insights survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from Nov. 3 to 19, 2025, among 1,002 U.S. hiring decision-makers.

The Job Seeker Report was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from Nov. 7 to 20, 2025, among 1,003 adults ages 18 and older.

For full survey methodologies, please contact [Sheena.Hollander@ExpressPros.com](mailto:Sheena.Hollander@ExpressPros.com), Director of Corporate Communications & PR.

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### **About Robert (Bob) Funk Jr.**

Robert (Bob) Funk Jr. is the Chief Executive Officer, President and Chairman of Express Employment International, a global staffing franchisor founded and headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He leads a portfolio of workforce solution brands, including the flagship Express Employment Professionals franchise, along with several affiliated brands serving specialized markets. The Express franchise brand is an industry-leading, international staffing company with franchise locations across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

### **About Express Employment Professionals**

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